

ON THE ARABIAN ORIGINS OF THE QUR'ĀN: THE CASE OF *AL-FURQĀN*

URI RUBIN

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

Abstract

This article draws attention to hitherto unnoticed Arabic texts in which the word *furqān* features as a genuine Arabic term denoting 'dawn' or 'morning'. It suggests that this genuine Arabic word is reflected in the Qur'ān, especially in those passages in which the term *furqān* stands for revealed scriptures. The Qur'ān calls these scriptures *furqān* in the sense that they are a guiding light that leads one out of darkness. The Syriac/Aramaic connotations of the term as encountered in other Quranic passages —mainly those referring to Moses— are also discussed, and their origin in the Syriac and Aramaic translations of the Book of Exodus is further clarified. The article shows that in these translations the Syriac / Aramaic *purqān* stands for redemption through separation, and this seems also to be the meaning of the Quranic *furqān* of Moses. The conflation of the Arabic and the Aramaic *furqāns* in the Qur'ān is also demonstrated, and finally the evidence of the *tafsir* is analysed. It is shown that the exegetes are aware of the targumic sense of *furqān* (redemption through separation), but they tend to prefer the sense of the local Arabian *furqān* (light of dawn), so much so that they have derived from the sense of light as opposed to darkness a series of secondary meanings revolving around the idea of separation of truth from falsehood.

Introduction

In a recent study of the Quranic term *furqān*, F.M. Donner proposes a new etymology for this term. In some cases he accepts its derivation from the Aramaic / Syriac word *purqānā* ('salvation'), as long assumed by many modern scholars, but argues that in other cases this derivation does not fit the Quranic context and suggests the Syriac *puqdānā* as a possible origin for those cases.¹

This means that according to Donner, the origin of the Quranic *furqān* is exclusively Aramaic/Syriac (either *purqānā* or *puqdānā*),

¹ Fred M. Donner, 'Quranic *Furqān*', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 52 (2007), 279–300.

and indeed from the very outset he gives up any attempt at finding Arabian origins for the term, asserting that, '*furqān* is not, to my knowledge, attested in early Arabic texts in contexts clearly independent of the Qur'ān'.² A similar argument against the Arabian origin of the word was already presented by A. Jeffery who said that '...there seems to be no evidence of the use of the word in Arabic earlier than the Qur'ān'.³

But some scholars have not been so sure of the exclusively non-Arabian origin of the Quranic *furqān*. For example, A.J. Wensinck spoke of two distinct words in the Qur'ān. One is the Syriac *purgānā*, meaning 'salvation' or 'deliverance', and the other is a genuine Arabic word meaning 'distinction', which the Qur'ān uses for 'revelation'.⁴ But Wensinck's view was altogether rejected by Jeffery who said that 'Wensinck seems to have been unduly influenced by the theories of the native commentators'.⁵

Wensinck, however, seems to have been correct in his basic assumption, although he was unable to provide sufficient evidence for the Arabian origins of the Quranic *furqān*. In what follows, such evidence is provided, which enables us to better understand the etymological history of the Quranic *furqān*.

The Genuine Arabian *furqān*

To begin with, the word *furqān* occurs in the available Arabic sources in contexts that are clearly independent of the Qur'ān. The lexicographer al-Azharī (d. 370/980) adduces an utterance attributed to an unidentified 'Bedouin' (*a'rābi*), who reportedly said: 'I went on having sex with her (*adfizu bihā*) until the *furqān* was shining (*ilā an sā'a 'l-furqān*)'. The word *furqān* is glossed by the words: *ay al-sahar*, 'that is to say, dawn'.⁶ The same utterance is recorded also in the *Lisān al-'arab* by Ibn Manzūr (d. 711/1311),⁷ and in the *Tāj al-'arūs* by al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790).⁸

² Donner 'Quranic *Furqān*', 280.

³ Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda 1938), 228.

⁴ A.J. Wensinck, s.v. 'Furqān', *EI* (old edition), II, 120.

⁵ Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 228, Note 4.

⁶ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughā* (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Muḥammad Abū 'l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, 16 vols. Cairo 1964–76), s.v. '*d.f.z.*' [XI, 488].

⁷ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'arab* (6 vols. Cairo n.d.), s.v. '*d.f.z.*' [IV, 2595 col. 1–2].

⁸ Muḥammad Murtadā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'arūs* (10 vols. Benghazi 1966), s.v. '*d.f.z.*' [IV, 46].

Needless to say, nothing is Quranic here. The recourse to the 'Bedouin' is a typical method used by the lexicographers in order to illustrate the significance and context of a given indigenous Arabic word or term. In this particular case, al-Azharī adduces the quotation from the Bedouin in order to illustrate the meaning of the verb *dafaza* ('to have sexual intercourse with'), and *furqān* occurs here as a normal, though not necessarily widely-current, word for the light of dawn.

A modified variation of the same utterance appears in al-Marzūqī's (d. 421/1030) *al-Azmina wa ɻ-amkina*, in a chapter dealing with Arabic terms describing the blackness of night. Since the sexual context is now irrelevant, the utterance of the Bedouin can be rephrased in a less offending manner. This time the Bedouin says: 'I went on acting wildly (*ata'ssafū*) in the darkness of night (*al-hawalwal*), till the *furqān* shone (*sata'a*)'. When asked what *al-hawalwal* was, the Bedouin said: 'The darkness of night'. When asked what the *furqān* was, he said: *al-subh* ('morning').⁹

Furqān in the sense of 'dawn' recurs in a poetic verse recorded by al-Azharī as part of a report of Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210/826). Its first hemistich runs as follows: *Fa-ṣabbāhat qabla adhāni ɻ-furqān*: 'They [i.e. the camels?] rose up early in the morning, before the call (*adhān*) to the *furqān* prayer'. Abū 'Ubayda explains that *furqān* is *subh*, 'morning'.¹⁰ The passage from Abū 'Ubayda recurs in *Lisān al-ārab*,¹¹ and in *Tāj al-Ārūs*.¹²

Here too the context — although clearly Islamic — is entirely non-Quranic. *Furqān* appears again in the sense of 'dawn', this time signalling the time of a well-known morning prayer, its legal time lasting from the crack of dawn till just before sunrise.

More insight into the significance of the word *furqān* in the sense of 'dawn' is provided by al-Zabīdī. Among the various meanings of the word, he records the report of the renowned Baṣrān philologist Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā' (d. 154/771), who says that *furqān* means 'morning' (*subh*) or 'dawn' (*sahar*), and notes that from this stems the expression: 'The *furqān* is shining (*sata'a*)', as well as the saying: 'This is brighter (*abyad*) than the *furqān*'.¹³

⁹ Abū 'Alī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina wa-ɻ-amkina* (ed. Khalfil al-Manṣūr, Beirut 1996), 433.

¹⁰ Al-Azharī, *Tahdīb al-lughā*, s.v. 'b.d.' [XIV, 206].

¹¹ *Lisān*, s.v. 'b.d.' [I, 224, col. 3].

¹² *Tāj al-Ārūs*, s.v. 'b.d.' [I, 43].

¹³ Ibid., s.v. 'f.r.q.' [VII, 45-6]. See also E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (2 vols., repr. Cambridge 1984), s.v. 'f.r.q.' [2385 col. 3]; Suliman Bashear, 'The Title *Fārūq* and its Association with 'Umar I', *Studia Islamica* 72 (1990), 50.

Elsewhere al-Zabīdī says that when signifying 'dawn', *furqān* is a metaphor (*wa-huwa majāz*),¹⁴ probably meaning that the word does not stand for dawn itself, only describes its function. Since the root *f.r.q.* signifies 'division', it seems that *furqān* is taken here as a verbal noun denoting splitting of darkness as light breaks through it.

Another form derived from the root *f.r.q.*, and which is likewise associated with dawn, is *faraq*. The expression *faraqu 'l-subh* is explained by the lexicographers as signifying 'the crack of dawn'. They say that it was called *faraq* because it has become separated (*fāraqa*) from the darkness of night.¹⁵ In some Arab dialects, the form *faraq* was interchangeable with *falaq*. Qutrub (Muhammad b. al-Mustanīr [d. 206/821]) says that the Arabs of the Tamīm used to say *faraqu 'l-subh*, while all others said *falaqu 'l-subh*.¹⁶

The affinity between *faraq* and *falaq* is also noted by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143) in his comments on Q 113:1. In this verse the 'Lord of the *falaq*' is invoked for protection. Al-Zamakhsharī explains that *falaq* and *faraq* denote 'morning' (*subh*), because night is split and separated from it (*yuflaqū 'anhu wa-yufraqū*). He goes on to note that from here stems the saying: 'The *furqān* is shining (*sātā'a l-furqān*)', i.e. 'the dawn has risen' (*tāla'a 'l-fajrū*).¹⁷

In sum, the above texts assert the existence of the word *furqān* in the local, or indigenous, Arabic of early, and possibly, pre-Islamic times. It functioned as a metaphor of 'dawn', in the sense of splitting of, or separation from, darkness, much like the forms *faraq* and *falaq*.

The Quranic *furqān*

At this point the question arises whether the Quranic *furqān* might reflect this local Arabian *furqān*, rather than the Syriac/Aramaic one. It seems that the sense of 'dawn' or 'separation from darkness' fits particularly well into those passages in which the term *furqān* stands for, or describes, a revealed scripture. That these passages may reflect a local Arabian *furqān* was already suggested by Wensinck (see above), and in view of the above data we are able to see more clearly the relationship between this genuine Arabic word and the Quranic notion of revelation. The idea behind the term *furqān* as a revealed scripture seems to be that the scripture is a source of guiding light

¹⁴ *Tāj al-'arūs*, s.v. 'd.f.z.' [IV, 46].

¹⁵ *Lisān*, s.v. 'f.r.q.' [V, 3400 col. 1]. See also Lane, *Lexicon*, 2385 col. 1.

¹⁶ Al-Marzūqī, *Azmina*, 243.

¹⁷ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (4 vols. Cairo 1966), IV, 300.

that leads one out of the darkness of ignorance. This seems to be the case in Q 25:1 in which *furqān* stands for the Qur'ān that has been revealed to Muḥammad: 'Blessed is he who sent down the *furqān* upon his servant that he may be a warner to all beings'. This verse seems to say that God sent down to the Prophet an illuminating message which enables him to warn people and show them the light of guidance. This verse is contained in a *sūra* which, according to the traditional Islamic chronology of the Qur'ān, was revealed in Mecca. The same recurs in *sūras* defined as Medinan. Thus in Q 2:185 the month of Ramadān is mentioned as the time when the Qur'ān was sent down, in order to bring 'guidance to men and clear signs of the guidance and of the *furqān*'. The explicit combination in this verse between *furqān* and guidance as two complementary aspects of the 'clear signs' is best understood when the *furqān* is perceived as light.

The word *furqān* appears side by side with guidance also in Q 3:3–4 [Medinan]: 'He has revealed to you the book with truth, verifying that which is before it, and he revealed the Torah and the Gospels (*Injil*) aforetime, a guidance for the people, and he sent down the *furqān* ...'

Guidance goes hand in hand not merely with the term *furqān* but also with a more explicit word for light, i.e. *nūr*. This is the case in Q 42:52 [Meccan] in which the book revealed to Muḥammad is said to have come as 'light, guiding thereby whom we please of our servants'. The word 'light' (*nūr*) as standing for the guiding message sent down to Muḥammad appears in further passages, Meccan (Q 7:157) as well as Medinan (Q 4:174; 5:15–16; 64:8). The guiding book itself is described as *kitāb munīr*, 'luminous book' (Q 22:8), which is also how books revealed to previous prophets are described (Q 35:25 [Meccan]; 3:184 [Medinan]). The book, or the Torah, that was revealed to Moses is also described as 'light and guidance' (Q 6:91 [Meccan]; 5:44 [Medinan]), and so is the *Injil* revealed to Jesus (Q 5:46 [Medinan]).

The term *furqān*, then, as a name for, or description of, revealed scriptures, fits perfectly well into the Quranic symbolism of light. In fact, the association between *furqān*, as standing for the Qur'ān, and light continued into post Quranic times. This is indicated by the phrase *munīr al-furqān* ('the luminous *furqān*') by which the Qur'ān was sometimes referred to by Muslims in the first Islamic era.¹⁸

But in the Qur'ān the word *furqān* is not just a guiding light. When made part of God's address to Muḥammad this local Arabian

¹⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Jumal min ansāb al-ashrāf* (ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyād Ziriklī, 13 vols. Beirut 1996), XIII, 87.

word seems to have acquired further meanings which had come into the Qur'ān from the Syriac/Aramaic. Western scholars already noted the Syriac/Aramaic parallel of the Quranic *fūrqān*,¹⁹ but have not yet provided the exact relationship between the two.

The Syriac/Aramaic connotations of the word *fūrqān* reached the Qur'ān together with the image of Moses. The latter brought in a *fūrqān* of his own, which consisted of a combination of two ideas: redemption and division.

The history of this combination begins in biblical Hebrew, with the word *pdut* (פָּדוּת). This word means 'redemption', as for example in Ps. 111:9: 'He [i.e. God] sent redemption (*pdut*) unto his people'.²⁰ However, the same word occurs also in Exod. 8:19 [23] where it is something which God sets between his own people and the people of Pharaoh. God says to Pharaoh: 'I will set *pdut* between my people and your people'. The context is the redemption of the Israelites from the swarms of flies which will not reach the Israelites in the Land of Goshen, because, as stated in the previous verse, God has set apart the Land of Goshen from the rest of Egypt. This context has lent the word *pdut* the sense of 'division', as if implying that the Israelites are redeemed when set apart from their foes.

This is indeed how the Hebrew *pdut* of Exod. 8/18 [23] was perceived in the Syriac/Aramaic translations. In the *Peshitta* (Syriac Bible) *pdut* is rendered *purshānā* ('distinction'), which God will make between the Israelites and the Egyptians.²¹ In the Aramaic translation known as *Targum Neophyti*, *pdut* is translated *purqān* ('redemption'). God says to Pharaoh: 'And I will set *purqān* between my people and your people'.²² Since *purqān* is set here between the two parties, it signifies redemption that comes from division or separation. In the *Targum Onkelos*, *pdut* is again *purqān*, but here an extended paraphrase is provided. God says to Pharaoh: 'I will make *purqān* for my people, and on your people I shall bring a plague [of flies]'.²³ The same paraphrase appears in the *Pseudo-Jonathan*.²⁴

¹⁹ E.g. Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 225–9; *El²*, s.v. 'Furkān' (R. Paret); Arne A. Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden 2004), 212; *EQ* s.v. 'Names of the Qur'ān' (Mustansir Mir); Donner, 286–8.

²⁰ See also Ps. 130:7.

²¹ Ch. Heller, *Peshitta in Hebrew Characters with Elucidatory Notes, Part II: Exodus* (Berlin 1929), 78.

²² Alejandro Díez Macho, *Neophyti 1. Tomo II. Éxodo* (Madrid 1970), 47.

²³ Israel Drazin, *Targum Onkelos to Exodus* (New York 1990), 97.

²⁴ E.G. Clarke, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken 1984), 74.

This targumic *purqān* by which God discriminates between the Israelites and the Egyptians, seems to be the origin of the Quranic *furgān* of Moses. It occurs in Q 21:48 [Meccan], which reads: 'We gave to Moses and Aaron the *furgān* and a light and a reminder for the God-fearing'. The close association between *furgān* and light (*diyā'*) in this verse retains the basic sense of the local Arabian *furgān* ('dawn'), but the fact that here it is given to Moses and Aaron in particular seems to allude to the targumic significance of the term as used for Exod. 8/19 [23]. The Qur'ān, however, does not use it in any specific context of the life of Moses, so that it retains a general meaning of deliverance through separation. Hence the Quranic verse demonstrates a conflation between the local Arabian significance of *furgān* and the targumic one.

The same conflation is demonstrated in Q 2:53 [Medinan] where the *furgān* is only given to Moses: 'We gave Moses the book and the *furgān* that you might be guided'. The *furgān* of Moses has been associated here with the guiding book that was revealed to him, a link which again combines the targumic *furgān* of Moses with the local Arabian one.

In Q 8:41 (Medinan) the word *furgān* seems to retain its pure targumic sense ('redemption by separation') although now it is something that is given to the Muslims instead of to Moses. This verse alludes to 'that which we sent down to our servant, on the day of the *furgān*, the day on which the two parties met...' The day of the *furgān* seems to stand for an Islamic military victory over the unbelievers [at Badr], and the *furgān* is evidently the 'distinction' which God made between the 'two parties', i.e. believers and unbelievers, which resulted in the redemption of the party of the latter. This is exactly the sense of the targumic *furgān* of Moses. The Qur'ān itself seems to be aware of the relationship between the Islamic victory and the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, because the locution 'the two parties' (*al-jam'ān*) recurs in Q 26:61 where it stands for the Israelites and the Egyptians who chase them.²⁵ It is noteworthy that the following passage (Q 26:62–3) describes the parting of the sea, for which the roots *f.l.q.* and *f.r.q.* are being used: The sea is 'split asunder' (*infalaqa*), and each 'part' (*firq*) of it stands like a huge mountain. This implies a new connotation of the idea behind the Quranic *furgān* of Moses: it is not merely division between Israelites and Egyptians as in the targumic *furgān*, but also the parting of the sea which assured the deliverance of the Israelites. In the Aramaic Bible

²⁵ This has already been noted by Donner, p. 289.

purqān already features in connection with the redemption of the Israelites from Pharaoh's army,²⁶ and this may well be the origin of the implied relationship between the Quranic *furqān* of Moses and the parting of the sea.

Another Medinan verse referring to *furqān* is Q 8:29 which defines the reward for piety: 'O believers, if you fear God, he will give you *furqān* and do away with your evil deeds and forgive you...'. A solid basis for assessing the *furqān* here is provided in a parallel Medinan verse, Q 65:2, in which God says: '...and whoever fears God, he will give him a way out (*makhraj*)'. The reward for piety is here *makhraj* which replaces *furqān*. The idea is repeated in Q 65:4, and this time the reward for piety is 'alleviation' (*yusr*): '...and whoever fears God he will give him alleviation in his affair'. If *makhraj* and *yusr* be taken as synonymous with *furqān*, then the latter seems to denote a way out from hardships, much like the targumic *furqān*.

In sum, the Quranic *furqān* reflects two basic etymological clusters, a local Arabian one which revolves around morning light as signifying splitting of, or separation from, darkness, and a targumic one which revolves around redemption achieved through division or separation. The local Arabian *furqān* can be discerned in passages in which this term conveys the sense of guidance, and is equated with a revealed book. The targumic *furqān* is discerned where this term is related to Moses, as well as to a victory of the Muslims over their foes.

The *Tafsīr*

In Islamic *tafsīr* the two etymological channels are reflected very clearly, but as is already the case in the Qur'ān, the two are not always kept apart.

As for the targumic *furqān* (redemption through separation), it is preserved in some interpretations of Q 8:29 in which, as seen above, the term *furqān* is a reward for piety, and is probably synonymous with *makhraj* and *yusr*, and denotes alleviation of worldly hardships. The exegetes are aware of the relationship between *furqān* and *makhraj*,²⁷ as they explain it as 'redemption' (*al-najāt*) and 'victory' (*al-nasr*).²⁸ Or as Ikrīma (d. 105/723) and al-Suddī (d. 128/746) reportedly said: 'He gave you *furqān*, i.e. redemption, which means

²⁶ Ibid., 289.

²⁷ See the traditions in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (30 vols. Būlāq 1323/1905, repr. Beirut 1972) on Q 8:29 [IX, 148].

²⁸ E.g. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr* (9 vols. Beirut 1984), III, 346.

that God separates you from whom you fear, and so you are redeemed'.²⁹

The targumic *furqān* is especially conspicuous in the exegesis of passages alluding to events in the life of Moses. Al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) provides in his comments on Q 2:53 several interpretations for the *furqān* given to Moses, one of which is 'victory (*naṣr*)', by which God has distinguished between Moses and Pharaoh, till he saved (*anja*) Moses and his people and drowned Pharaoh and his people'.³⁰ Another interpretation on al-Māwardī's list takes *furqān* to stand for the splitting of the sea before the Israelites.³¹ This is inspired by the Quranic usage of the root *frq*. for the parting of the sea (see above).

The targumic *furqān* is reflected also in the interpretations of Q 21:48 in which the *furqān* is given to Moses and Aaron. Al-Māwardī has recorded the interpretation of al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), to the effect that this *furqān* stands for victory and redemption (*al-naṣr wa'l-najāt*); God has given victory to Moses and his supporters and destroyed Pharaoh and his followers.³²

But in spite of the survival of the targumic *furqān* in the *tafsīr*, the exegetes tend quite naturally to prefer the local Arabian sense of *furqān* ('light of dawn'), and they endeavour to apply it to all the Quranic occurrences of the term, including those in which the term retains the targumic sense of redemption through division or separation.

This is most conspicuous in some further interpretations of Q 8:29, in which *furqān* is promised as a reward for piety. The exegetes reinterpret the term as 'light', and take its synonymous *makhraj* to denote separation from some kind of mental darkness. For example, al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1111) writes in his *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, that the *furqān* promised to the believers in Q 8:29 was explained as denoting 'light (*nūr*) by which truth (*al-haqq*) is distinguished from falsehood (*al-bātil*), and by which one gets out from doubts (*wa-yukhrajū bihi min al-shubuhāt*)'.³³

²⁹ Al-Wāhidī, 'Alī b. Ahmad, *al-Wasīt fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-majīd* (ed. 'Ādil Ahmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd *et al.*, 4 vols. Beirut 1994), II, 454.

³⁰ Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa'l-uyūn fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (ed. 'Abd al-Maqṣūd b. 'Abd al-Rahīm, 6 vols. Beirut 1992), I, 121. See also al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa'l-asrār al-ta'wil* (2 vols. Beirut 1988), I, 62.

³¹ Al-Māwardī, *Nukat*, I, 122. See also Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, on Q 2:53 [I, 81]; al-Bayḍāwī, on Q 21:48 [II, 72].

³² Al-Māwardī, *Nukat*, III, 450. See also Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, V, 355.

³³ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (5 vols. Cairo 1967), III, 31.

Ghazālī's words evince a reformulation of the idea of *furqān* and *makhraj*, which now are no longer redemption from worldly hardships, but rather 'a way out from doubts'. This shift from the worldly to the spiritual meaning is evidently inspired by the local Arabian sense of *furqān* as light of dawn; it is encountered already in the comments of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) on Q 8:29. Muqātil defines the term *furqān* as a *makhraj* ('way out') which leads one out of *shubuhāt* ('doubts').³⁴ Muqātil has applied the same meaning to other Quranic occurrences of *furqān* in which it stands for a revealed scripture. This is seen in his comments on Q 2:185,³⁵ 3:4,³⁶ and 25:1.³⁷

Ghazālī's words also show how the exegetes have elaborated on *furqān* as 'light', adding to it a further secondary meaning derived from the root *f.r.q.*, i.e. 'distinction between truth and falsehood'. This derivation, too, is encountered already in earlier sources. In his comments on Q 8:29, al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1853) says that by giving *furqān* to the believers God puts into their hearts 'guidance and light' (*hidāyatān wa-nūran*) by which 'you shall distinguish between truth and falsehood'. He traces this interpretation, which obviously draws on the local Arabian sense of *furqān*, back to Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767) and Ibn Zayd (d. 182/798).³⁸

A similar interpretation appears in some earlier *tafsīr* compilations. Al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035) quotes Ibn Zayd who reportedly said that *furqān* in Q 8:29 is the distinction within the hearts of the believers between truth and falsehood.³⁹

The earliest appearance of this interpretation can be traced back to 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/713). This can be done thanks to Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938) who has recorded in his *Tafsīr* a tradition of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/768) which the latter quotes from 'Urwa, through the latter's nephew, Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. al-Zubayr. 'Urwa is said to have explained the term *furqān* of Q 8:29 as denoting 'distinction (*fāṣl*) between truth and falsehood, by which God brings into light (*yuzbiru*) your truth (*haqqakum*) and extinguishes (*yutfi'u*) the falsehood (*bāṭil*) of those who disagree with you (*man khālafakum*)'.⁴⁰ This interpretation appears already in the *Sīra* of Ibn

³⁴ Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (ed. 'Abdallāh Maḥmūd Shihāta, 5 vols. Cairo 1979), II, 110.

³⁵ Muqātil, I, 161.

³⁶ Ibid., I, 262.

³⁷ Ibid., III, 225.

³⁸ Al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'āni* (30 vols. Beirut n.d.), IX, 196.

³⁹ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wal-bayān 'an tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (ed. Abū Muḥammad b. 'Āshūr and Nazīr al-Sā'idi, 10 vols. Beirut, 2002), IV, 348.

⁴⁰ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm* (ed. As'ad Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib,

Ishāq, but without an *isnād*.⁴¹ Its terminology of light shows how the basic meaning of the local Arabian *furqān* ('light of dawn') was extended to denote the light of truth as distinct from the darkness of falsehood.

The sense of distinction between truth and falsehood was the one which the exegetes liked most, and they applied it even to cases in the Qur'ān in which *furqān* is explicitly related to Moses, i.e. reflecting the targumic *purgān*. They could do it quite easily because the Quranic *furqān* of Moses already combined the ideas of redemption and separation. For example, al-Māwardī records in his comments on Q 21:48 an interpretation of Ibn Zayd to the effect that the *furqān* of Moses and Aaron stands for the 'proof' (*burhān*) which distinguished between the truth (*haqq*) of Moses and the falsehood (*bātil*) of Pharaoh.⁴² This is also how Muqātil already interprets the *furqān* given to Moses in Q 2:53. He says that it stands for 'victory (*naṣr*), when God separated between truth and falsehood. He gave victory to Moses and destroyed Pharaoh'.⁴³

Furthermore, in some interpretations the *furqān* of Moses and Aaron (Q 21:48) was entirely detached from the conflict with Pharaoh, and was equated with the Torah; as such it was explained as marking separation of the lawful from the unlawful. This interpretation was reported on the authority of Mujāhid (d. 104/722) and Qatāda (d. 117/735).⁴⁴ It changes the meaning of the *furqān* of Moses from redemption to guidance, thus transforming it from targumic into local Arabian. Similarly, the *furqān* given to Moses in Q 2:53 was interpreted as the Torah which distinguishes between truth and falsehood. This view was reported on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.⁴⁵

The sense of distinction between truth and falsehood also permeated the expression *yawm al-furqān* of Q 8:41. Muqātil explains it as

10 vols. Riyad 1997), V, 1686 (no. 8990). See also Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, IV, 348. Cf. al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, on Q 8:29 [IX, 148]: Printed *yukhfī* instead of the correct *yutfi'u*.

⁴¹ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya* (ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Shalabī, 4 vols. Beirut 1971), II, 325. The interpretation is included in a chapter assembling the Quranic verses revealed in connection with the battle of Badr.

⁴² Al-Māwardī, *Nukat*, III, 450. See also Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, V, 355.

⁴³ Muqātil, I, 107–8.

⁴⁴ Al-Māwardī, *Nukat*, III, 450. See also Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, V, 355. And see the traditions in al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, on Q 21:48 [XVII, 26].

⁴⁵ Al-Māwardī, *Nukat*, I, 121. See also Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, I, 81. And see the traditions in al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, on Q 2:53 [I, 225–6].

standing for 'the day of victory, on which God has separated truth from falsehood, and gave victory to the Prophet and defeated the polytheists at Badr'.⁴⁶

Likewise, the *furqān* promised to the believers in Q 8:29 was interpreted as victory which separates the follower of truth (*al-muhibb*) from the follower of falsehood (*al-mubtil*).⁴⁷

The sense of 'division between truth and falsehood' was especially appropriate for all those Quranic passages in which the term *furqān* stands for, or describes, a revealed scripture, and such an interpretation appears indeed in the various commentaries on these verses.⁴⁸

Finally, another kind of elaboration on the basic meaning of light as inherent in the local Arabian *furqān* is seen in the interpretation of al-Zamakhsharī of Q 8:29. Among the various optional explanations, al-Zamakhsharī adduces the interpretation of *furqān* in the sense that 'God will give you fame and will spread your reputation and achievements all over the earth' (... *yushhiru amrakum wa-yabutthu ṣitakum wa-āthārakum fi aqtār al-ard*). Al-Zamakhsharī adds that this is derived from the saying: 'I did so and so till the *furqān* shone (*sata'a*)', i.e. the dawn rose (*ay tala'a ɻ-fajru*).⁴⁹ Apart from a censured allusion to the above saying of the Bedouin, this interpretation shows another direction in which the sense of light was elaborated on. Here it symbolizes fame and reputation. Such derivation seems to be inspired by the saying (*mathal*): *ashhar min faraq al-ṣubh*, 'more famous than the crack of dawn'.⁵⁰ The same interpretation has been repeated by al-Bayḍāwī (d. c. 685/1286) on Q 8:29,⁵¹ as well as by al-Ālūsī.⁵²

Summary and Conclusion

The above study has demonstrated that the word *furqān* is not an exclusively non-Arabic loanword, as held by many, but has also pure

⁴⁶ Muqātil, II, 116. See also al-Māwardī, *Nukat*, II, 321; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masnū*, III, 361. And see the traditions in al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, on Q 8:41 [X, 7–8].

⁴⁷ Al-Bayḍāwī, I, 381.

⁴⁸ See the traditions to that effect in al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, on Q 2:185 [II, 85]; 3:4 [III, 111]; 25:1 [XVIII, 136].

⁴⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, II, 154.

⁵⁰ Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *Jamharat al-amthāl* (ed. Ahmad ‘Abd al-Salām and Muhammad b. Basyūnī Zaghlūl, 2 vols. Beirut 1988), I, 459 (no. 1047). Var.: *ashhar min falaq al-ṣubh*. See *ibid.*, no. 1046.

⁵¹ Al-Bayḍāwī, I, 381.

⁵² Al-Ālūsī, IX, 196.

Arabian roots, discerned in non-Quranic texts in which it stands for the light of dawn. The Qur'ān employs it mainly to describe revealed scriptures in their capacity as origin of guiding light. But the targumic (Syriac/Aramaic) connotations of the Quranic *furqān* are also present in passages in which *furqān* is related to Moses, and denotes 'redemption by division or separation'.

The exegetes of the Qur'ān are aware of the significance of *furqān* as 'redemption', but they prefer to interpret the Quranic *furqān* in the sense of 'distinction between truth and falsehood'. This is not merely a sterile manipulation designed to provide false Arabian origins to a non-Arabic loanword, as held by many,⁵³ but is rather an honest exegetical effort revolving around the genuine sense of light as inherent in the purely local Arabian *furqān*.

This means that even when faced with cases of loanwords, one must never give up the quest for the Arabian origins of the Qur'ān. They are certainly out there, waiting to be unveiled.

⁵³ See e.g. Donner, 299 n. 45, who suggests that '*furqān* as a verbal noun of *faraqa* "to separate, discriminate", which we find in dictionaries, is itself a product of the exegetical work of early Qur'ān scholars grappling with these Qur'ānic verses'.